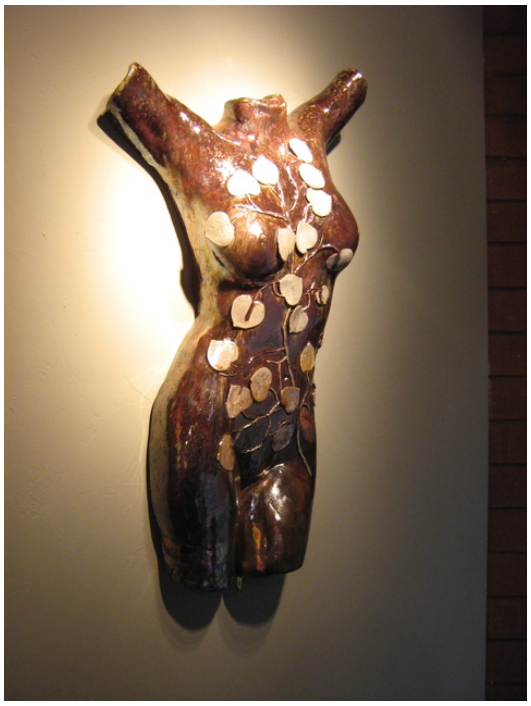

Photo #1

Photo 2

Photo 3

Photo 4

Supporting the Model in Life Casting, Part I

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When I began life casting 20 years ago, having had no instruction and being clueless, I tried to reinvent the wheel. I recall distinctly the first torso casting I attempted. I asked a young ice skater neighbor whom I had used as a model for several bronzes to don a leotard and be my first subject; perhaps “victim” is a better word. I applied alginate and constructed a mother mold. What I hadn’t realized was that alginate tangles in the fuzz of cotton fabric and it was firmly attached to the leotard. I left the room so as not to embarrass (a word that appropriately almost contains “bare ass”) her and she, with her mother’s help, was able to wiggle out without damaging the mold. And luckily,I was able to carefully pull the leotard loose doing only minimal damage to the impression of the cloth. After painting in plaster I got what I thought was a pretty good casting, at least for a first try. I hung it proudly on a studio wall erroneously thinking that the main lessons learned were to select a leotard made of non fuzzy material and to use a mold release as well. I later realized that most models are only too willing to be cast oh natural making the process even simpler. But I digress. There was another and far more important lesson.

A few days after I made “Young Skater #1,” a collector of mine who just happened to be an orthopedic surgeon, dropped by for a visit. I proudly asked, “What do you think?” he considered my latest contribution to art history for all of a second and a half and replied, “She is either four months pregnant or has a liver disease.” I hadn’t even noticed that her stomach protruded. The reason was because of the way I had positioned her, I had asked her to stand in the middle of the studio. The alginate is very light and didn’t

Photo 5

Photo 6

Photo 7

Photo 8

affect her stance. However, the weight of the mother mold was enough to cause her to extend her stomach and lean back to maintain her balance. The much more important lesson was that the model must be supported so that he/she can hold the desired position. Unfortunately, no one solution fits all.

My first thought was to have had the model lie down. But then I realized that there are two problems with this, both verified with later experimentations. The first is that if the model is female, her breasts flatten out unnaturally and unflatteringly. Also, less obvious is the fact the a lying down figure does not have the same spinal contour as a standing body. However, it is sometimes desirable and even necessary to have your model lie down; more about this later.

Heads don't come out any better than torsos if the model is lying down. The face is distorted compared to being vertical when cast. The extreme demonstration of the effects of gravity is to place a mirror horizontally and look down at yourself. You probably won't like what you see. But even face up, there is noticeable distortion. The effects of gravity are directly proportional to one's age, the older we are, the more saggy our skin. Also, if the model's hair is longer than a few inches, it will fall back and not hang down naturally.

When deciding how to support the model, there are several things to keep in mind. The first is the comfort of the model. Do not ask a model to do the impossible. Notice that in photograph #1 titled "Aspen," both arms are raised. Even though it took only between 20 and 25 minutes to make the mold, both of the model's arms went completely asleep. Had

the arms not been supported, she could not have held them in place. Next is whether or not whatever body parts one is casting are accessible. For example, if a model is positioned too high, the casters may not be able to reach or even see where to apply the alginate. Too low can be a pain in the back.

Most of my castings are of three types. The first includes from the top of the head to below the breasts and far enough back to include the ears and hair as in photo # 2. Often one or both arms are part of the casting. (See photo #3.) The second is a torso which includes from the top of the neck to mid thigh as in photo #1. The third is a head in the round as in photo #4. (See Life Casting a Head in the Round Part I and II, *SJ*, February and March, 2005 by DP.) In this month's article, I will explain how I position the models for these. Next month, I will cover a number of different approaches.

The seemingly obvious way to cast a face would be to have the subject sit in a chair, preferably with an adjustable head support such as a barber's chair which not only supports the head, but also adjusts vertically and horizontally to position the model for comfort and ease of casting. In photograph #5, assistant Jessica, is situated in such a chair. If one plans on casting only the head down to the top of the shoulders, then this works just fine. I have found that the more of the model I include in the casting, the less suitable a chair is. A better solution just happens to be the same for torso casting as well. But before I describe it, there is one application in which sitting is the ideal position, a head in the round. In this case, I have the model sit but I remove the head support which would block access to the back of the head. (Photo #6)

For what I consider my normal castings as in photographs #1 through #3,I prefer to have the model stand while leaning back against a padded board which is "L" shaped so that the feet remain perpendicular to the back. Photograph #7 shows assistant, Jessica, in position. The casting board is tilted back about fifteen degrees, far enough for comfort but not so much as to cause distortion. Because she is standing, her face is at a convenient height. Notice the two foam pads behind her back and head. These are both for her comfort and for proper spinal alignment. Remember, a person's butt extends back further than one's back. This especially true for females and leaning back without this additional support will make the stomach protrude foreword, much to the chagrin of the model. The additional support behind the head is for the model's comfort. Almost everybody needs this extra head support except for ballet dancers who, as a group I have found, have perfect posture. I have plastic covered pads prepared in both one and two feet squares and from one to four inches thick with two inches being the most used.

Photo 9

Photo 10

Photo 11

There are a couple of other things I want to point out in this photograph. The black cloth covering Jessica's "assets" is a non fuzzy stretch nylon that has had a piece of elastic sewed into the top. The cloth stretches sideways only and not up and down. Jessica is wearing a paper medical type gown which covered her while we worked "Cholesterol" hair conditioner into her hair. She is also wearing some old scrubs to keep alginate and plaster off of her pants. Behind Jessica is cheesecloth that is held in place by the hook side of velcro strips glued on the outside edges of the back of the backboard. (See below.) The cheesecloth serves two purposes. The first is to facilitate cleanup, the alginate and plaster drippings cling to the cheesecloth and are simply discarded later with the cheesecloth. The second is that alginate wraps around the model and also clings to the cheesecloth and helps keep the model in desired position. This same board works equally as well when casting a torso as in photo #8.

A casting backboard is very easy to construct as can be seen in photographs #9 and #10 along with five and a half foot tall assistant Amber for scale. All that is needed is a piece of 3/4 inch plywood or fiberboard supported by a 2X4 frame. The padding is just 2 inches of foam held in place with a nogahide covering. Be sure to make the 2x4 frame narrow enough to allow for attachment of the nogahide. The white strips down both sides of the back are the hook side of velcro for attaching the cheesecloth. The small dark rectangles at the at the bottom of each 2x4 support are rubber strips that wrap around the bottom so that the backboard will not slip when leaning against a wall. Pieces of bicycle inner tube about 8 inches long are ideal for this. For those who want more specific dimensions, the backboard shown is 76

inches tall and 25 inches wide. Since cheesecloth comes in one yard width, 25 inches is as wide as the backboard can be and still have the cheesecloth attach to the velcro strips on the back. The shelf extends extends out 16 inches. I have found that a casting board is very versatile and work even with small children and pregnant tummies and torsos. (Photos #11 and #12)

If some readers are wondering if we got Jessica all dressed up for photograph #7 just to take her picture, in fact we did cast her. Photograph #13 shows a Jessica not the worse for wear with a plaster duplicate of her face. This is not the final product. I will clean up some small imperfections in the plaster, make a silicone rubber mold of it, and cast her in metallic Forton MG which I will show in next month's issue of *Sculpture Journal*. Also, I will cover some more information on using a casting backboard and explain some other ways of supporting the models for different applications.

Photo 12

Photo 13